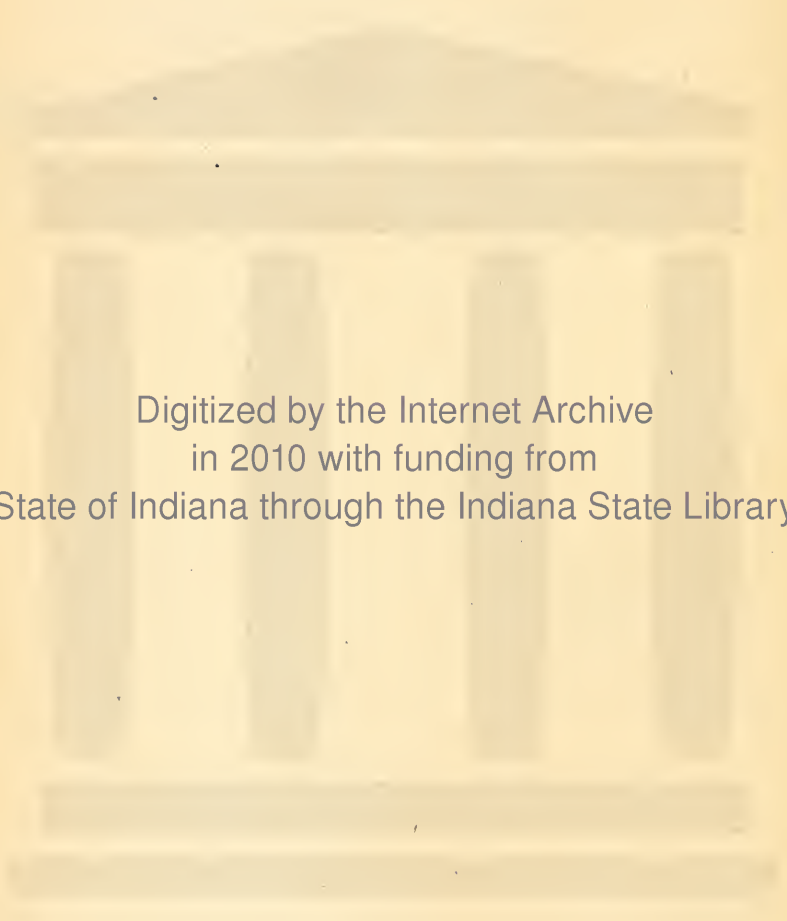




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17
Lincoln

[Lincoln, Abraham] Message

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Peace:

message of the President

Feb 10th 1865



PEACE.

MESSAGE

FROM THE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,

TRANSMITTING,

In compliance with the resolution of February 8th, 1865, information relative to a conference held at Hampton Roads with Messrs. A. H. Stephens, R. M. T. Hunter, and J. A. Campbell.

FEBRUARY 10, 1865.—Read, laid upon the table and ordered to be printed.

To the honorable the House of Representatives :

In response to your resolution of the 8th instant, requesting information in relation to a conference recently held in Hampton Roads, I have the honor to state, that on the day of the date I gave Francis P. Blair, senior, a card, written on as follows, to wit :

“Allow the bearer, F. P. Blair, senior, to pass our lines, go south, and return.
“ A. LINCOLN.

“ December 28, 1864.”

That at the time I was informed that Mr. Blair sought the card as a means of getting to Richmond, Virginia ; but he was given no authority to speak or act for the government, nor was I informed of anything he would say or do on his own account, or otherwise. Afterwards Mr. Blair told me that he had been to Richmond, and had seen Mr. Jefferson Davis ; and he (Mr. B.) at the same time left with me a manuscript letter, as follows, to wit :

RICHMOND, VA., *January 12, 1865.*

SIR : I have deemed it proper, and probably desirable to you, to give you, in this form the substance of remarks made by me, to be repeated by you to President Lincoln, &c., &c.

I have no disposition to find obstacles in forms, and am willing, now as heretofore, to enter into negotiations for the restoration of peace ; and am ready to send a commission whenever I have reason to suppose it will be received, or to receive a commission, if the United States government shall chose to send one. That, notwithstanding the rejection of our former offers, I would, if you could promise that a commissioner, minister, or other agent would be received, appoint one immediately, and renew the effort to enter into conference, with a view to secure peace to the two countries.

Yours, &c.

JEFFERSON DAVIS.

F. P. BLAIR, Esq.

Afterwards, and with the view that it should be shown to Mr. Davis, I wrote and delivered to Mr. Blair a letter, as follows, to wit:

WASHINGTON, *January 18, 1865.*

SIR: Your having shown me Mr. Davis's letter to you of the 12th instant, you may say to him that I have constantly been, am now, and shall continue ready to receive any agent whom he, or any other influential person now resisting the national authority, may informally send to me, with the view of securing peace to the people of our one common country.

Yours, &c.,

A. LINCOLN.

F. P. BLAIR, Esq.

Afterwards Mr. Blair dictated for and authorized me to make an entry on the back of my retained copy of the letter last above recited, which entry is as follows:

JANUARY 28, 1865.

To-day Mr. Blair tells me that on the 21st instant he delivered to Mr. Davis the original, of which the within is a copy, and left it with him; that at the time of delivering it Mr. Davis read it over twice in Mr. Blair's presence, at the close of which he (Mr. Blair) remarked that the part about "our one common country" related to the part of Mr. Davis's letter about "the two countries," to which Mr. Davis replied that he so understood it.

A. LINCOLN.

Afterwards the Secretary of War placed in my hands the following telegram, indorsed by him as appears:

[Cipher.]

OFFICE UNITED STATES MILITARY TELEGRAPH,
War Department.

The following telegram received at Washington, January 29, 1865, from headquarters army of James, 6.30 p. m., January 29, 1865:

"The following despatch just received from Major General Parke, who refers it to me for my action. I refer it to you in Lieutenant General Grant's absence.

"E. O. C. ORD,

"Major General Commanding.

"Hon. EDWIN M. STANTON,

"Secretary of War."

"HEADQUARTERS ARMY OF POTOMAC,

"4 p. m., January 29, 1865.

"The following despatch is forwarded to you for your action. Since I have no knowledge of General Grant's having had any understanding of this kind, I refer the matter to you as the ranking officer present in the two armies.

"JNO. G. PARKE,

"Major General Commanding.

"Major General E. O. C. ORD,

"Headquarters Army of James."

"FROM HEADQUARTERS NINTH ARMY CORPS, 29TH.

"Alex. H. Stevens, R. M. T. Hunter, and J. A. Campbell desire to cross my lines, in accordance with an understanding claimed to exist with Lieutenant General Grant, on their way to Washington as peace commissioners. Shall they be admitted? They desire an early answer, to come through immediately.

Would like to reach City Point to-night, if they can. If they cannot do this, they would like to come through at 10 a. m. to-morrow morning.

"O. B. WILCOX,

Major General Commanding 9th Corps.

"Major General JNO. G. PARKE,

"Headquarters Army of Potomac."

Respectfully referred to the President for such instructions as he may be pleased to give.

EDWIN M. STANTON,
Secretary of War.

January 29—8.30 p. m.

It appears that about the time of placing the foregoing telegram in my hands, the Secretary of War despatched General Ord, as follows, to wit :

[Sent in cipher at 2 a. m., 30th.]

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Washington City, January 29, 1865—10 p. m.

SIR: This department has no knowledge of any understanding by General Grant to allow any person to come within his lines as commissioner of any sort. You will therefore allow no one to come into your lines under such character or profession, until you receive the President's instructions, to whom your telegram will be submitted for his directions.

EDWIN M. STANTON,
Secretary of War.

Major General ORD.

Afterwards, by my direction, the Secretary of War telegraphed General Ord as follows, to wit:

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Washington, D. C., 10.30 a. m., January 30, 1865.

SIR: By direction of the President, you are instructed to inform the three gentlemen, Messrs. Stephens, Hunter, and Campbell, that a messenger will be despatched to them at or near where they now are without unnecessary delay.

EDWIN M. STANTON,
Secretary of War.

Major General E. O. C. ORD,
Headquarters Army of the James.

Afterwards I prepared and put into the hands of Major Thomas T. Eckert the following instructions and message :

EXECUTIVE MANSION,
Washington, January 30, 1865.

SIR: You will proceed with the documents placed in your hands, and, on reaching General Ord, will deliver him the letter addressed to him by the Secretary of War; then, by General Ord's assistance, procure an interview with Messrs. Stephens, Hunter, and Campbell, or any of them. Deliver to him or them the paper on which your own letter is written. Note on the copy which you retain the time of delivery, and to whom delivered. Receive their answer in writing, waiting a reasonable time for it, and which, if it contain their decision to come through, without further condition, will be your warrant to ask General Ord to pass them through, as directed in the letter of the Secretary of War to him. If, by their answer, they decline to come, or propose other terms, do not have them passed through. And this being your whole duty, return and report to me.

Yours truly,

A. LINCOLN.

Major T. T. ECKERT.

Messrs. Alex. H. Stephens, J. A. Campbell, and R. M. T. Hunter:

GENTLEMEN: I am instructed by the President of the United States to place this paper in your hands, with the information that if you pass through the United States military lines, it will be understood that you do so for the purpose of an informal conference, on the basis of the letter, a copy of which is on the reverse side of this sheet, and that, if you choose to pass on such understanding, and so notify me in writing, I will procure the commanding general to pass you through the lines and to Fortress Monroe, under such military precautions as he may deem prudent, and at which place you will be met in due time by some person or persons, for the purpose of such informal conference; and, further, that you shall have protection, safe conduct, and safe return in all events.

THOMAS T. ECKERT,

Major and Aide-de-Camp.

CITY POINT, Va., February 1, 1865.

WASHINGTON, January 18, 1865.

SIR: Your having shown me Mr. Davis's letter to you of the 12th instant, you may say to him that I have constantly been, am now, and shall continue ready to receive any agent whom he, or any other influential person now resisting the national authority, may informally send to me, with the view of securing peace to the people of our one common country.

Yours, &c.,

A. LINCOLN.

F. P. BLAIR, Esq.

Afterwards, but before Major Eckert had departed, the following despatch was received from General Grant:

[Cipher.]

OFFICE UNITED STATES MILITARY TELEGRAPH,
War Department.

The following telegram received at Washington, January 31, 1865. From City Point, Va., 10.30 a. m., January 30, 1865.

His Excellency ABRAHAM LINCOLN,
President of the United States:

The following communication was received here last evening:

"PETERSBURG, Virginia, January 30, 1865.

"SIR: We desire to pass your lines under safe conduct, and to proceed to Washington, to hold a conference with President Lincoln upon the subject of the existing war, and with a view of ascertaining upon what terms it may be terminated, in pursuance of the course indicated by him in his letter to Mr. Blair of January 18, 1865, of which we presume you have a copy, and if not we wish to see you in person, if convenient, and to confer with you upon the subject.

"Very respectfully yours,

"ALEXANDER H. STEPHENS.

"J. A. CAMPBELL.

"R. M. T. HUNTER."

Lieutenant General U. S. GRANT,
Commanding Armies United States.

I have sent directions to receive these gentlemen, and expect to have them at my quarters this evening, awaiting your instructions.

U. S. GRANT,
Lieut. Gen'l Commanding Armies U. S.

This, it will be perceived, transferred General Ord's agency in the matter to General Grant. I resolved, however, to send Major Eckert forward with his message, and accordingly telegraphed General Grant as follows, to wit:

EXECUTIVE MANSION,
Washington, January 31, 1865.

Lieutenant General GRANT,
City Point, Va.:

A messenger is coming to you on the business contained in your despatch. Detain the gentlemen in comfortable quarters until he arrives, and then act upon the message he brings as far as applicable, it having been made up to pass through General Ord's hands, and when the gentlemen were supposed to be beyond our lines.

A. LINCOLN.

Sent in cipher at 1.30 p. m.

When Major Eckert departed, he bore with him a letter of the Secretary of War to General Grant, as follows, to wit:

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Washington, D. C., January 30, 1865.

GENERAL: The President desires that you will please procure for the bearer, Major Thomas T. Eckert, an interview with Messrs. Stephens, Hunter, and Campbell, and if, on his return to you, he request it, pass them through our lines to Fortress Monroe, by such route and under such military precautions as you may deem prudent, giving them protection and comfortable quarters while there, and that you let none of this have any effect upon your movements or plans.

By order of the President:

EDWIN M. STANTON.
Secretary of War.

Lieutenant General GRANT,
Commanding, &c.

Supposing the proper point to be then reached, I despatched the Secretary of State with the following instructions, Major Eckert, however, going ahead of him:

EXECUTIVE MANSION,
Washington, January 31, 1865.

You will proceed to Fortress Monroe, Virginia, there to meet and informally confer with Messrs. Stephens, Hunter, and Campbell, on the basis of my letter to F. P. Blair, esq., of January 18, 1865, a copy of which you have.

You will make known to them that three things are indispensable, to wit:

1. The restoration of the national authority throughout all the States.
2. No receding, by the Executive of the United States, on the slavery question, from the position assumed thereon in the late annual message to Congress, and in preceding documents.
3. No cessation of hostilities short of an end of the war and the disbanding of all forces hostile to the government.

You will inform them that all propositions of theirs, not inconsistent with the above, will be considered and passed upon in a spirit of sincere liberality. You will hear all they may choose to say, and report it to me.

You will not assume to definitely consummate anything.

Yours, &c.,

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

HON. WILLIAM H. SEWARD,
Secretary of State.

On the day of its date, the following telegram was sent to General Grant :

[Sent in cipher at 9.30 a. m.]

Lieut. Gen. GRANT, *City Point, Va.*

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Washington, D. C., February 1, 1865.

Let nothing which is transpiring change, hinder, or delay your military movements or plans.

A. LINCOLN.

Afterwards the following despatch was received from General Grant :

[In cipher.]

OFFICE U. S. MILITARY TELEGRAPH,
War Department.

The following telegram received at Washington 2.30 p. m. February 1, 1865, from City Point, Virginia, February 1, 12.30 p. m., 1865 :

Your despatch received. There will be no armistice in consequence of the presence of Mr. Stephens and others within our lines. The troops are kept in readiness to move at the shortest notice, if occasion should justify it.

U. S. GRANT, *Lieut. General.*

His Excellency A. LINCOLN,
President United States.

To notify Major Eckert that the Secretary of State would be at Fortress Monroe, and to put them in communication, the following despatch was sent :

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Washington, D. C., February 1, 1865.

Call at Fortress Monroe, and put yourself under direction of Mr. S., whom you will find there.

A. LINCOLN.

Major T. T. ECKERT,
Care of General Grant, City Point, Va.

On the morning of the 2d instant, the following telegrams were received by me, respectively, from the Secretary of State and Major Eckert :

FORT MONROE, VA.,
11.30 p. m., *February 1, 1865.*

Arrived at ten this evening. Richmond party not here. I remain here.

WILLIAM H. SEWARD.

The President of the United States.

CITY POINT, VA.,
10 p. m., February 1, 1865.

His excellency A. LINCOLN, *President of the United States* :

I have the honor to report the delivery of your communication and my letter 4.15 this afternoon, to which I received a reply at 6 p. m., but not satisfactory.

At 8 p. m. the following note, addressed to General Grant, was received :

CITY POINT, Va., February 1, 1865.

SIR: We desire to go to Washington city, to confer informally with the President, personally, in reference to the matters mentioned in his letter to Mr. Blair, of the 18th January, ultimo, without any personal compromise on any question in the letter. We have the permission to do so from the authorities in Richmond.

Very respectfully yours,

ALEX. H. STEPHENS.
R. M. T. HUNTER.
J. A. CAMPBELL.

Lieutenant General GRANT.

At 9.30 p. m., I notified them that they could not proceed further, unless they complied with the terms expressed in my letter. The point of meeting designated in the above note would not, in my opinion, be insisted upon. Think Fort Monroe would be acceptable. Having complied with my instructions, I will return to Washington to-morrow, unless otherwise ordered.

THOS. T. ECKERT,
Major, &c.

On reading this despatch of Major Eckert, I was about to recall him and the Secretary of State, when the following telegram of General Grant to the Secretary of War was shown me :

[In cipher.]

OFFICE UNITED STATES MILITARY TELEGRAPH,
War Department.

The following telegram received at Washington 4.35 a. m., February 2, 1865.
From City Point, Va., February 1, 10.30 p. m., 1865.

Now that the interview between Major Eckert, under his written instructions, and Mr. Stephens and party has ended, I will state confidentially, but not officially, to become a matter of record, that I am convinced, upon conversation with Messrs. Stephens and Hunter, that their intentions are good and their desire sincere to restore peace and union. I have not felt myself at liberty to express even views of my own, or to account for my reticency. This has placed me in an awkward position, which I could have avoided by not seeing them in the first instance. I fear now their going back without any expression from any one in authority will have a bad influence. At the same time I recognize the difficulties in the way of receiving these informal commissioners at this time, and do not know what to recommend. I am sorry, however, that Mr. Lincoln cannot have an interview with the two named in this despatch, if not all three now within our lines. Their letter to me was all that the President's instructions contemplated to secure their safe conduct, if they had used the same language to Major Eckert.

U. S. GRANT,
Lieutenant General.

Hon. EDWIN M. STANTON,
Secretary of War.

This despatch of General Grant changed my purpose; and accordingly I telegraphed him and the Secretary of State respectively as follows :

[Sent in cipher at 9 a. m.]

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Washington, D. C., February 2, 1865.

Lieut. Gen. GRANT, *City Point, Virginia:*

Say to the gentlemen I will meet them personally at Fortress Monroe as soon as I can get there.

A. LINCOLN.

[Sent in cipher at 9 a. m.]

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Washington, D. C., February 2, 1865.

Hon. WM. H. SEWARD, *Fortress Monroe, Virginia:*

Induced by a despatch from General Grant, I join you at Fort Monroe as soon as I can come.

A. LINCOLN.

Before starting the following despatch was shown me. I proceeded, nevertheless :

[Cipher.]

OFFICE U. S. MILITARY TELEGRAPH,
War Department.

The following telegram, received at Washington, February 2, 1865, from City Point, Virginia, 9 a. m., February 2, 1865 :

[Copy to Hon. Edwin M. Stanton, Secretary of War, Washington.]

Hon. WM. H. SEWARD, *Secretary of State, Fort Monroe :*

The gentlemen here have accepted the proposed terms, and will leave for Fort Monroe at 9.30 a. m.

U. S. GRANT,
Lieutenant General.

On the night of the 2d I reached Hampton Roads, found the Secretary of State and Major Eckert on a steamer anchored off shore, and learned of them that the Richmond gentlemen were on another steamer also anchored off shore, in the roads, and that the Secretary of State had not yet seen or communicated with them. I ascertained that Major Eckert had literally complied with his instructions, and I saw, for the first time, the answer of the Richmond gentlemen to him, which, in his despatch to me of the 1st, he characterizes as "not satisfactory." That answer is as follows, to wit :

CITY POINT,
Virginia, February 1, 1865.

MAJOR: Your note, delivered by yourself this day, has been considered. In reply, we have to say that we were furnished with a copy of the letter of President Lincoln to Francis P. Blair, esq., of the 18th of January ultimo, another copy of which is appended to your note.

Our instructions are contained in a letter, of which the following is a copy :

“ RICHMOND, *January 28, 1865.*

“ In conformity with the letter of Mr. Lincoln, of which the foregoing is a copy, you are to proceed to Washington city for informal conference with him upon the issues involved in the existing war, and for the purpose of securing peace to the two countries.

“ With great respect, your obedient servant,

“ JEFFERSON DAVIS.”

The substantial object to be obtained by the informal conference is, to ascertain upon what terms the existing war can be terminated honorably.

Our instructions contemplate a personal interview between President Lincoln and ourselves at Washington city, but with this explanation we are ready to meet any person or persons that President Lincoln may appoint, at such place as he may designate.

Our earnest desire is, that a just and honorable peace may be agreed upon, and we are prepared to receive or to submit propositions which may, possibly, lead to the attainment of that end.

Very respectfully yours,

ALEXANDER H. STEPHENS.
R. M. T. HUNTER.
JOHN A. CAMPBELL.

THOMAS T. ECKERT,

Major, and A. D. C.

A note of these gentlemen, subsequently addressed to General Grant, has already been given in Major Eckert's despatch of the 1st instant.

I also here saw, for the first time, the following note, addressed by the Richmond gentlemen to Major Eckert :

CITY POINT, *Va., February 2, 1865,*

MAJOR: In reply to your verbal statement, that your instructions did not allow you to alter the conditions upon which a passport could be given to us, we say that we are willing to proceed to Fortress Monroe, and there to have an informal conference, with any person or persons that President Lincoln may appoint, on the basis of his letter to Francis P. Blair of the 18th of January ultimo, or upon any other terms or conditions that he may hereafter propose, not inconsistent with the essential principles of self-government and popular rights upon which our institutions are founded.

It is our earnest wish to ascertain, after a free interchange of ideas and information, upon what principles and terms, if any, a just and honorable peace can be established without the further effusion of blood, and to contribute our utmost efforts to accomplish such a result.

We think it better to add, that, in accepting your passport we are not to be understood as committing ourselves to anything, but to carry to this informal conference the views and feelings above expressed.

Very respectfully yours, &c ,

ALEXANDER H. STEPHENS.
J. A. CAMPBELL.
R. M. T. HUNTER.

THOMAS T. ECKERT,

Major, and A. D. C.

NOTE.—The above communication was delivered to me at Fort Monroe, at 4.30 p. m., February 2d, by Lieutenant Colonel Babcock, of General Grant's staff.

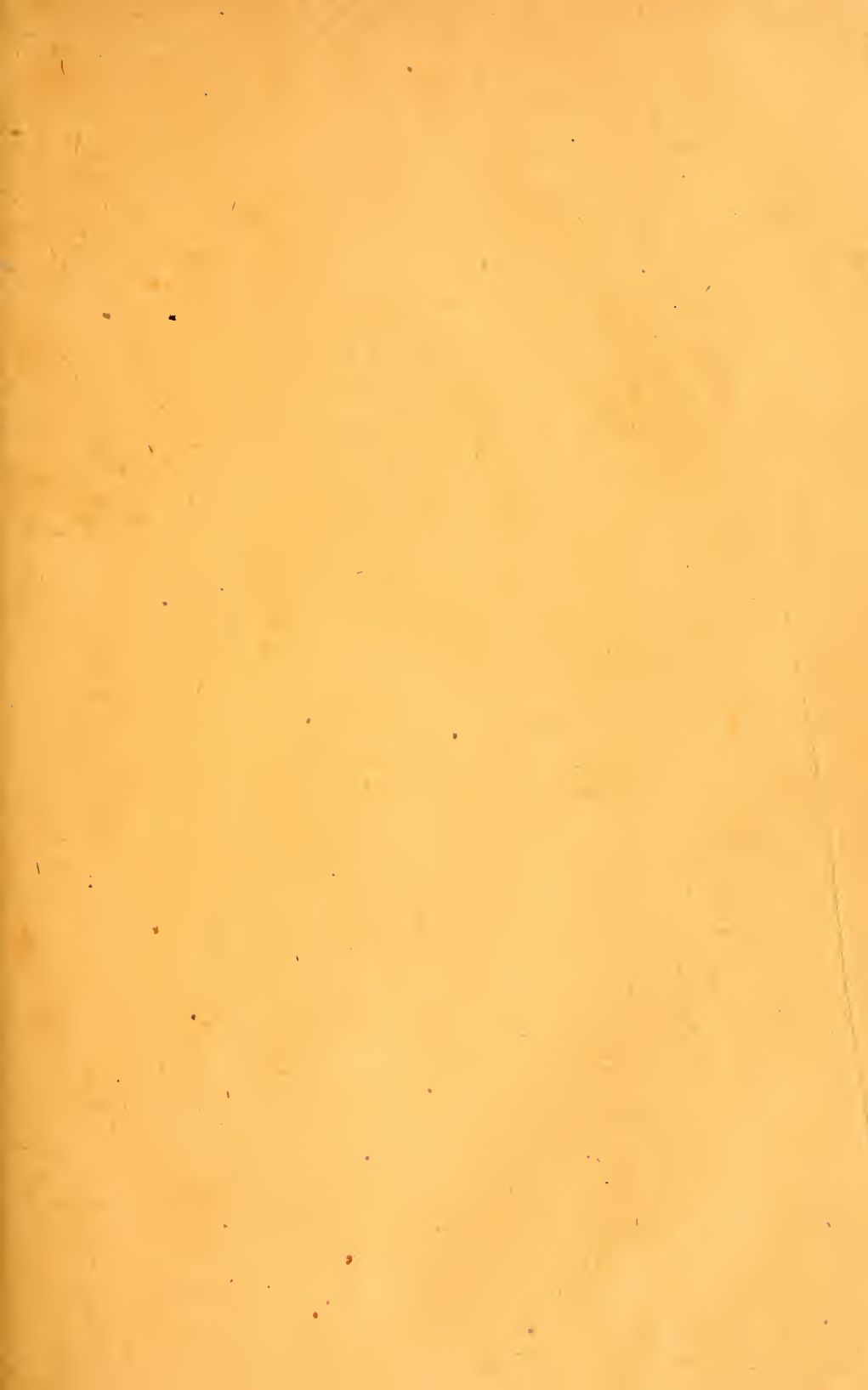
THOS. T. ECKERT, *Major, and A. D. C.*

On the morning of the 3d, the three gentlemen, Messrs. Stephens, Hunter, and Campbell, came aboard of our steamer, and had an interview with the Secretary of State and myself, of several hours' duration. No question of preliminaries to the meeting was then and there made or mentioned. No other person was present; no papers were exchanged or produced; and it was, in advance, agreed that the conversation was to be informal and verbal merely. On our part, the whole substance of the instructions to the Secretary of State, hereinbefore recited, was stated and insisted upon, and nothing was said inconsistent therewith; while, by the other party, it was not said that in any event or on any condition, they *ever* would consent to reunion; and yet they equally omitted to declare that they *never* would so consent. They seemed to desire a postponement of that question, and the adoption of some other course first which, as some of them seemed to argue, might or might not lead to reunion; but which course, we thought, would amount to an indefinite postponement. The conference ended without result.

The foregoing, containing as is believed all the information sought, is respectfully submitted.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

EXECUTIVE MANSION, *February* 10, 1865.







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